



Massachusetts State Police
Case Master Report 2015-117-402
Date Initiated 06/26/2015

Warning

Contains entities exempt from disclosure

Primary Information

Agency: **Massachusetts State Police**
Bureau: **Division of Investigative Services**
Division: **Investigative Services 1**
Unit: **Fire & Explosion Investigation**
Squad: **Fire Investigation Central Team**
Lead LEO: **Riley, Mike (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)**
Type Of Case: **Fire Investigation**
Case Description: **35 Pearl St Webster Mill Fire**

Authorized Operators

Name

Cunningham, Stephen (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)
Spahl, Gregory (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)

Case Status

Case Status: **CLOSED**
Case Status Date: **11/06/2015**
Disposition Code: **CLOSED/COMPLETED**
Disposition Date: **11/06/2015**
Dissemination: **Chain of Command**



Massachusetts State Police
FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT 2015-117-402

Report Date: 06/26/2015

Warning

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Primary Information

Description: 35 Pearl St Webster Mill Fire
Occurrence From: 06/26/2015 13:06
Occurrence To: 06/27/2015 09:00
Reporting LEO: Riley, Mike (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)
Approval Status: Approved
Approved Date: 11/06/2015
Approved By: Fafard, Matthew (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)
Discovered/Reported: Passerby
Reason: Assit to Other Agency
Requester: Webster Fire Department
Cause Of Fire: Undetermined

Response Information

Time Call Received: 07/25/2015 13:06

Property Information

Property Description: Vacant Mill
Property Use: Commercial
Mobile: NO

Fire Origin Information

<u>Area/Origin</u>	<u>Description</u>
Unknown	fire originated in rear building by SOM building

Insurance Information

Insured: 35 Pearl Street LLC
Insurance Agent: DeSantis
Comments: Liability Insurance only

Synopsis

On June 25, 2015 at 1400 hours I was advised by Sgt Steve Cunningham of a large commercial mill fire at 35 Pearl Street in the Town of Webster. The 21,000 square foot property was built in 1920 with several additions throughout the years. The vacant property contained five buildings that were all connected via a walkway or catwalk. Several 911 callers reported seeing smoke in the area. First responding fire and police personal reported The fire on the interior rear side of the structure facing the railroad tracks. The fire eventually spread to the properties at 21 Pearl Street and 7 Rail Road Ave. Suppression efforts lasted three days and had a total of seven alarms and involved over 20 fire departments. Investigators conducted several interviews and obtained surveillance footage from several nearby business owners. The scene examination has been completed and the investigation is ongoing at this time. Four firefighters were injured and transported for minor injuries during suppression efforts.



Massachusetts State Police
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Address #1 - LOCATION OCCURRED #1 - 21 Pearl Street Webster

Primary Information

Address: 21 Pearl Street Webster, MASSACHUSETTS , UNITED STATES

Address #2 - LOCATION OCCURRED #2 - 35 Pearl St Webster

Primary Information

Address: 35 Pearl St Webster, MASSACHUSETTS , UNITED STATES

Description: vacant mill

Address #3 - LOCATION OCCURRED #3 - 7 Rail Road Ave Webster

Primary Information

Address: 7 Rail Road Ave Webster, MASSACHUSETTS , UNITED STATES

Subject #1 - WITNESS #1 - Gevry, Lenny

Primary Information

Exempt From Disclosure: YES

Subject Name: Gevry, Lenny

Record Type: LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICIAL

Juvenile: NO

Subject #2 - WITNESS #2 - Shaw, Mike

Primary Information

Subject Name: Shaw, Mike

Record Type: PERSON

Bio: WHITE, MALE

Juvenile: NO

Subject #3 - OTHER #1 - Kennedy, Matt

Primary Information

Subject Name: Kennedy, Matt

Record Type: PERSON

Bio: WHITE, MALE

Juvenile: NO

Subject #4 - OTHER #2 - Studley, Mark

Primary Information

Subject Name: Studley, Mark

Record Type: PERSON

Bio: 52 yr. old, WHITE, MALE

Birth Date: [REDACTED]



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Subject #4 - OTHER #2 - Studley, Mark - Continued

Primary Information - Continued

Juvenile: NO

Subject #5 - OWNER #1 - MAHLA, WALTER

Primary Information

Subject Name: MAHLA, WALTER
Record Type: PERSON
Bio: 57 yr. old, WHITE, MALE
Birth Date: [REDACTED]
Juvenile: NO

Personal Information

Height: 0

Subject #6 - OWNER #2 - Mehta, Dilip

Primary Information

Subject Name: Mehta, Dilip
Record Type: PERSON
Bio: MIDDLE EASTERN or EAST INDIAN (South Asia), MALE
Juvenile: NO

Subject #7 - OWNER #3 - Morscheza, Wesley

Primary Information

Subject Name: Morscheza, Wesley
Record Type: PERSON
Bio: WHITE, MALE
Juvenile: NO

Record Status Information

Record Origination Operator: Riley, Mike (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)
Record Origination Date: 06/26/2015 00:11
Last Update Operator: Fafard, Matthew (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)
Last Update Date: 11/06/2015 13:23

Reporting LEO	Date	Supervisor	Date
Riley, Mike (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)		Fafard, Matthew (Fire Investigation Central Team / Massachusetts State Police)	3/2/2016



Massachusetts State Police
FIRE INVESTIGATION REPORT 2015-117-402
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Narrative begins on the following page.

NOTIFICATION AND RESPONSE

1. On June 25, 2015 at 1400 hours I was advised by Sgt Steve Cunningham of a large commercial mill fire at 35 Pearl Street in the Town of Webster. He advised I contact Webster Fire Chief Hickey for information pertaining to the fire. The Chief stated suppression efforts were ongoing and were requesting assistance at the scene. I arrived on scene with Sgt. Cunningham, Tpr Spahl and Tpr. Desrochers. Suppression efforts continued and would continue for the next two days as the fire rapidly spread throughout several buildings. The seven alarm fire was assisted by more than 20 fire departments. Four firefighters were slightly injured during suppression efforts. An investigation into the cause and origin of the structure fire had begun.

BUILDING INFORMATION

2. The property where the fire originated at 35 Pearl Street has five buildings and 266,800 square feet on 6.1 acres. It was built in 1880 with several additions throughout the years. It was owned and operated by 35 Pearl Street LLC since its purchase on August 28, 2014. The vacant property contained five buildings that were all connected via a walkway or catwalk. The buildings were empty with the exception of a few furniture items, tires, wooden pallets and miscellaneous items that were left by previous tenants. The fire eventually spread to the buildings located at 21 Pearl Street and 7 Railroad.
3. The business at 21 Pearl Street was owned and operated by Mehta, Dilip (DOB [REDACTED]) It is three floors and is 57,414 square feet. The flat roof is tar and gravel and has a brick exterior siding. It is located approximately 30 feet from 35 Pearl Street.
4. The property located at 7 Railroad was operated by SOM Construction and was owned by Morscheza, Wesley (DOB [REDACTED]) It had aluminum siding with a flat roof and was 22,000 square feet. It was used as a storage facility and had a workshop area on the first floor.

WITNESS STATEMENTS

5. The investigators had a conversation with Webster Deputy Chief Jolda. The Deputy was one of the first responding firefighters on scene. He stated the first of several 911 calls was received at 1306 hours. When he arrived on scene he located fire and smoke initially in the rear of a building at 35 Pearl Street directly adjacent to the railroad tracks. He stated there was heavy fire in the bottom floor that was spreading quickly towards the interior of the building and towards the building located at 7 Railroad. The Deputy was wearing a Go Pro camera on his fire helmet that was viewed and confirmed his statements.
6. We then spoke with Webster Firefighter Michael Anese. He stated he arrived and also noticed fire and smoke in the lower floor of a building in the rear of 35 Pearl Street. After a gate was forced open he stated they were able to begin fighting the blaze from the rear and from the railroad tracks.
7. Investigators then spoke with Studley, Mark (DOB [REDACTED]) He stated he was an employee of 35 Pearl Street LLC and was previously in the building a couple days prior to the fire. He was in the building with Maccari, Mike of Mid City Scrap Company. While inside they encountered two white teenage males trespassing in the building. Studley stated he escorted

them out of the property. He did not notify the police and stated he could not identify the individuals.

8. I then spoke with Mahla, Walter (DOB [REDACTED]). He is the owner of 35 Pearl Street LLC. He stated the building had been vacant for several months and his company was researching ideas for the buildings future. He stated the company only had liability insurance on the property. He stated he was last in the building a couple weeks prior to the fire. He also stated that the building still had power that entered through an overhead service on the front side of the buildings.
9. Investigators then had conversation with Morscheza, Wesley. He stated he had owned SOM Construction located at 7 Railroad for six years. He also stated he had no insurance on the building. He stated he had trouble with National Grid in recent months trying to get power restored to his company. National Grid informed him he needed to put a separate service into the building before it could be activated. The building was originally part of the complex at 35 Pearl Street before it was sold separately. Morscheza stated he was in his building the morning of the fire and did not notice anything unusual. He stated it was common to see people frequently walking the railroad tracks behind his building.
10. I then spoke to the former maintenance supervisor at 35 Pearl Street, Gabis, Tom. He stated he was laid off in August 2014 when the property was sold. He informed us that there were no major issues with the electricity when he left. There were several companies in the building that were evicted when the new ownership took over. He then stated the building was left vacant since the new ownership.
11. Former employee Kennedy, Matt was also interviewed. He worked for the new ownership until they went their separate ways in January 2015. He stated Mahla had planned to demolish the building as soon as he could get a permit.
12. Investigators then had a conversation with Mehta, Dilip. He stated his property at 21 Pearl Street was insured by Liberty Mutual. He had owned the property since January of 2000. He stated he had several video cameras around his property. These were examined by investigators and showed no significant information. Mehta also stated he was out of town at the time of the fire and that nobody was in his building at that time.

SCENE EXAMINATION

13. Investigators began a systematic examination into the origin and cause of the structure fire using an exterior to interior, least to most damage exam. Investigators began on the "A" side of the structures and worked clockwise around to the "D" portion of the buildings. For the purpose of this report the "A" side of the structures face North Main Street. The "A" side of the building at 35 Pearl Street suffered the least amount of damage. As investigators arrived on scene this building was completely intact. It eventually caught fire during suppression efforts. The "AB" side of the building had on only partial collapse. The rest of the building was completely destroyed by fire damage.
14. The other four buildings on the property of 35 Pearl Street suffered heavy exposure damage on all sides. Twisted metal support beams protruded in all directions from the buildings. All of the exterior walls were consumed or collapsed. After suppression efforts all five buildings were unrecognizable in the giant pile of debris.
15. The property at 21 Pearl St had the least amount of damage. This property was located on the "B" side of the structures. The "C" portion of this building suffered fire and smoke damage.

Smoke and fire damage in this area extended up to the roofline. Heavy water damage was evident throughout the interior of this building.

16. The building at 7 Railroad was located on the "C" portion of the structures. Steel support beams remained intact on this structure. Heavy thermal and fire damage was observed on all three floors of this structure. This structure had also become engulfed during suppression after initial fire was observed in an adjacent building.
17. After completing the exterior exam investigators concentrated their efforts on the interior of the building. Due to the overwhelming destruction of the building we concentrated our efforts on the building where the fire was first reported through interviews and pictures. This building was located at 35 Pearl Street on the "C" portion of the property. We systematically delayered the area and carefully overhauled the debris. An excavator was used to assist investigators in the process. This building had three floors with an asphalt pitched roof. Several burnt tires, furniture pieces and severely charred wooden pallets were located. Thermal and fire damage was fairly consistent throughout, giving little indication of any more significantly damaged areas. Electrical inspector Larry Fisher conducted an examination on wiring and electrical panels throughout this structure (see report).

CONCLUSION

18. Investigators conducted a thorough examination into the origin and cause of the fire. It was determined that the fire originated in the rear building near the train tracks at 35 Pearl St. Due to the extreme destruction of the fire, investigators were unable to pinpoint the exact location of origin. Investigators could not completely rule out electrical or incendiary as a cause of the fire. As a result this fire will remain undetermined. This case should be considered closed inconclusive, pending any additional information that would warrant its reopening.

Respectfully Submitted,

Trooper Michael W. Riley #2919
Massachusetts State Police
Fire and Explosion Investigation Section